

Five things you wanted to know about audiovisual translation research, but were afraid to ask

 **Agnieszka Szarkowska** 

Institute of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw
Centre for Translation Studies, University College London

 **Piotr Wasylczyk** 

Faculty of Physics, University of Warsaw
Faculty of Engineering Sciences, University College London

Abstract

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Young researchers often encounter questions, problems and hurdles at the early stages of their careers that relate to areas (apparently) outside their core subject. These may span from selecting the research topic and methodology to publishing strategies and identifying the position of audiovisual translation research in a wider framework of the fast-changing academic world. Drawing on our experience in audiovisual translation and natural sciences research, we address some of these issues in a way we wish someone had done for us many years ago.

Key words: audiovisual translation, research, subtitling, publishing, media accessibility

 a.szarkowska@uw.edu.pl; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0048-993X>

 pwasylicz@uw.edu.pl; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0851-9838>

Dear Young Researcher,

We hope our letter finds you well. We are sorry to hear that your paper on audiovisual translation has recently been rejected from one of the top translation studies journals. It happened to nearly all of us. One of us has recently received the following response from a high-impact journal after sending them a manuscript reporting results of an eye tracking study on subtitling:

I have now considered your paper, and I applaud the time and effort you put forth in conducting and presenting your research. This paper has a number of strengths, but unfortunately, I feel that it is not suitable for publication in [journal title], and thus I have decided not to send it out for an external review. Our journal is focused on other subjects. I felt that your research fell outside of this scope.

The manuscript did not fit their profile. In fact, it did not fit *any* journal profile. There is no journal on experimental studies in subtitling. Come to think of it, there is no journal at all focusing on audiovisual translation (AVT) as such. Or there hasn't been, until now.

Research in AVT is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Back in 2007, at the *Audiovisual Translation: Multidisciplinary Approaches* conference in Montpellier (Serban, Matamala & Lavour, 2012), it was claimed that it is not enough for AVT researchers to be conversant with other fields like experimental and cognitive psychology, film studies, information technology, deaf studies or sound engineering; we also needed to co-operate with researchers from other disciplines. Ten years on, we have indeed witnessed important changes in the way we work, do research and publish. But where are we as a discipline? Below you will find our contribution to the on-going discussion about the status of AVT as a discipline.

1.1. “Audiovisual translation – what is it?”

In its traditional core sense, AVT is about how films and TV programmes are translated from one language to another, mainly through dubbing or subtitling (Chaume, 2006, 2014; Díaz Cintas, 1999, 2013; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Gambier, 2006). Today, however, AVT researchers are interested in many more modalities and research avenues than interlingual transfer alone.

Apart from interlingual subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over (Díaz Cintas & Orero, 2006; Franco, Matamala, & Orero, 2013; Orero, 2009), which Gambier referred to as dominant modalities back in 2003, AVT has eagerly embraced other modalities, including audio description for the blind (AD), subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing (SDH), sign language interpreting, live subtitling, audio subtitling, opera surtitling, to name just a few (Gambier, 2003, 2004). AD and SDH fall under the umbrella term *media accessibility*, which has been thriving in AVT research in recent years (Díaz Cintas, Matamala, & Neves, 2010; Díaz Cintas, Orero, & Remael, 2007; Remael, Orero, & Carroll,

2012). Some scholars even call for a departure from the term *audiovisual translation* towards *media accessibility*, arguing that translating a film makes it *accessible* to viewers who otherwise could not have access to the dialogue. In this sense, *media accessibility* can be considered a higher-level umbrella term encompassing *audiovisual translation* (Greco, 2018; Jankowska, forthcoming; Romero-Fresco, 2018).

AVT – both as a discipline and as a term – is relatively young compared to its elder siblings: linguistics and translation studies (Díaz Cintas, 2004; Gottlieb, 1992). Some trace the beginnings of AVT back to the birth of cinema (Gambier & Gottlieb, 2001), whilst others would rather talk about the intellectual ferment from the 1990s, which kicked it off from a somewhat sluggish start, particularly following the 1995 conference on audiovisual communication and language transfer in Strasbourg (Gambier, 2004, 2013; von Flotow, 1995).

Not only is pinpointing the birth date of AVT problematic, but so is the term itself. In the early days, various names were given to this area of study, such as *screen translation*, *multimedia translation*, *transadaptation*, *film translation*, *versioning*, *language transfer*, etc. (Gambier, 2003, 2013; Gambier & Gottlieb, 2001). Now, the dust has settled, and most scholars and practitioners have agreed on using *audiovisual translation*, which is also reflected in the name of this very journal.

This brings us to the question you asked us last time:

1.2. “Is there anything interesting left for me to research?”

Judging by the number of Bachelor, Master and PhD theses submitted across the world, you may think that AVT is mainly about comparing originals with their translations, aimed at analysing the strategies used and possibly at criticising the translator. Indeed, if you want to join a myriad of researchers pursuing the ever-popular topics of culture-specific items or humour in translation and reinvent the wheel with yet another analysis of translation strategies¹, you may soon discover that JAT editors may not find it as appealing as you may have expected. But don't fret – there are still many unexplored, exciting research avenues to pursue.

In recent years, research in AVT has been flourishing (Chaume, 2002, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2016) and a number of exciting projects and publications have seen the light of day. These include a host of reception studies and translation process research (Chmiel & Mazur, 2016; Denton & Ciampi, 2012; Di Giovanni, 2013; Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018; Jensema, 1998; Kruger, Hefer, & Matthew, 2014; Mangiron, 2016; Mazur & Chmiel, 2012; Perego, 2016; Perego, Del Missier, Porta, & Mosconi, 2010; Perego et al., 2016; Rajendran, Duchowski, Orero, Martínez, & Romero-Fresco, 2013; Romero-Fresco & Fryer, 2013; Widler, 2004; Wissmath, Weibel, & Groner, 2009; Beuchert, 2017; Carl, Bangalore, & Schaeffer, 2016; Hansen, 2013; Hvelplund, 2011; Hvelplund, 2017; Jankowska, 2015; Orrego-Carmona, Dutka, & Szarkowska, 2016; Orrego-Carmona, Dutka, & Szarkowska, 2018). Not only can

you do interesting research in this area, but you also get to play with fancy, high-tech toys such as eye trackers, EEG, heart rate or galvanic skin response devices (Doherty & Kruger, 2018; Kruger & Doherty, 2016; Kruger, Doherty, Fox, & de Lissa, 2017; Kruger, Doherty, & Soto-Sanfiel, 2017; Orrego-Carmona, 2016; Perego et al., 2010; Ramos, 2015; Romero-Fresco, 2015).

If you like to think of yourself as a *doer* and want to change the world, think about joining the ranks of scholars working to improve the audiovisual experience for users of audio description, sign language interpreting and subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing. This line of research is pursued within the growing area of media accessibility (Braun & Orero, 2010; Colmenero, Dominguez, & Ruiz, 2014; Díaz Cintas et al., 2010; Fryer, 2010, 2016; Jankowska, 2015; Jankowska, Wilgucka, & Szarkowska, 2014; Pedersen, 2012; Remael et al., 2012; Szarkowska, 2011; Szarkowska, Jankowska, Kowalski, & Krejtz, 2016; Szarkowska, Krejtz, Klyszejko, & Wieczorek, 2011; Utray, Pereira Rodríguez, & Orero, 2009; Walczak & Fryer, 2017). If you are into new technologies, why not work on some accessibility apps, like *AudioMovie*, *MovieReading*, or *OpenArt*?

For a perfectionist willing to improve things, it may be interesting to look into quality (House, 2013; Mikul, 2014; Pedersen, 2017; Robert & Remael, 2017; Robert, Remael, & Bastin, 2016; Romero-Fresco, 2016; Romero-Fresco & Pöchhacker, 2017). If you are more theoretically inclined, AVT has some theoretical frameworks you can work with (Arrojo, 2013; Assis Rosa, 2016; Braun, 2016; Buzelin, 2013; Kruger, 2016; Kruger & Steyn, 2014; Neves, 2016; Nord, 2013; Remael, Reviers & Vandekerckhove, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Or how about sparking some controversy with professional translators by dabbling into machine translation (Bywood, Georgakopoulou, & Etchegoyhen, 2017; Bywood, Volk, Fishel, & Georgakopoulou, 2013; Fernández-Torné & Matamala, 2016; O'Brien, 2014; Ortiz Boix, 2016; Ortiz-Boix & Matamala, 2017)? Professional translation aside, AVT also abounds in fan translations and crowdsourcing (Antonini & Bucaria, 2016; Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; Dwyer, 2012; Jimenez-Crespo, 2017; Luczaj Holy-Luczaj, & Cwiek-Rogalska, 2014; Massidda, 2015; Munday, 2012; Nord, 2015; Orrego-Carmona, 2016; Pérez-González, 2012; Wang, 2014).

Being a young discipline, AVT and its history are still under-researched with plenty of space to look into archive material (Díaz Cintas, 2018; Gromová & Janecová, 2013; O'Sullivan & Cornu, in press; Zanotti, 2018). More research is also needed in the area of AVT and gender (De Marco, 2012, 2016; Fasoli, Mazzurega, & Sulpizio, 2016; Feral, 2011), multilingualism (Heiss, 2004; Meylaerts, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2011; Remael, 2012; Szarkowska, Żbikowska, & Krejtz, 2013), AVT corpora (Baños, Bruti, & Zanotti, 2013; Prieels, Delaere, Plevoets, & De Sutter, 2015; Reviers, Remael, & Daelemans, 2015) or ideology, manipulation and censorship (Bucaria, 2017; Díaz Cintas, 2012; Dwyer, 2009; Hołobut, 2012; Kruger, 2012; Rashid, 2016; Scandura, 2004; Wang & Zhang, 2016).

Is teaching something you are more interested in? Why not research AVT translator training (Al Dabbagh, 2017; Chmiel, Lijewska, Szarkowska, & Dutka, 2017; Di Giovanni & Geraghty, 2016; Díaz Cintas, 2008; Dorado & Orero, 2007; Kim, 2013; Orrego-Carmona et al., 2018; Remael, 2008; Romero-Fresco, 2012; Szarkowska, Krejtz, Dutka, & Pilipczuk, 2018)? Do not forget to check out some

of the EU-funded projects on AVT, such as ADLAB PRO (Audio Description: A Laboratory for the Development of a New Professional Profile), ILSA (Interlingual Live Subtitling for Access) and ACT (Accessible Culture & Training), which aim to define the competencies of audio describers, interlingual live subtitlers and accessibility managers, respectively. Speaking of projects, make sure you become familiar with some AVT-related projects, both completed and ongoing, such as DTV4ALL, HBB4ALL, SUMAT, UMAQ, SURE, Immersive Accessibility, Easy TV, NEA, ClipFlair, CompAsS or EU Bridge. A good starting point may be Media Accessibility Platform (MAP)^I, Translation Studies Bibliography^{III} or BITRA Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation^{IV}.

AVT plays an important role in education, particularly in language acquisition and learning. Did you know that AVT can not only improve your receptive skills in a foreign language, but also language production, not to mention other skills? A new wave of publications on educational roles of different AVT modalities has seen the light of day in recent years (Bolaños García-Escribano, 2017; Kothari, 2008; I. Krejtz, Szarkowska, Krejtz, Walczak & Duchowski, 2012; K. Krejtz, Krejtz, Duchowski, Szarkowska & Walczak, 2012; Kruger et al., 2017; Kruger et al., 2014; Mahlasela, 2017; McLoughlin & Lertola, 2014; Talaván, Ibáñez & Bárcena, 2016; Talaván & Lertola, 2016; Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón, 2014; Vanderplank, 2010, 2013, 2016; Walczak, 2016).

You may be somewhat overwhelmed by all the titles and names above. The list is surely impressive – yet, by no means exhaustive. However, please bear in mind that we tend to trust and revere the written, published word and we sometimes take it for granted. But is everything that has ever been published true?^V And even so, maybe it was indeed true 20 years ago, when some of the studies were done, but what about today, in the ever-changing world of the information technology revolution? Would you perhaps be interested in questioning the status quo? That is one of the ways science progresses.

But as a graduate of linguistics, translation, or philology, you may now be wondering...

1.3. “How to do research (properly)?”

If you studied linguistics, like the first author here, you probably left the university happily holding your Master’s diploma, but without having much of an idea about how scientific research is planned and executed. If you were lucky enough to join an ambitious, lively, research-oriented group during your PhD, this might have improved over the following years. If you weren’t, you may have discovered that research methodology is not your strongest asset.

Today, whether you like it or not, humanities are often adopting the research strategies and methodologies used in social, physical, technical, and life sciences. These include research project planning; working in research groups rather than alone; data collection, processing and analysis; and publishing styles, like this new journal. The scientific landscape, shaped with

policies set by universities and funding bodies, influences how research results are published. For many scholars the ultimate dissemination medium is a monograph (often, *the Book*) – usually taking a few years to write and at least another year to publish.

According to a recent Nielsen BookScan^{vi}, in the United Kingdom, on average, an academic book in linguistics sold 50 copies in 2004, and 13 copies in 2015. In contrast, writing a series of short papers for a high-impact journal that provides publication within two months from submission^{vii} on average (including peer-review – yes, this is possible, and without compromising the publication quality), may be the winning strategy in terms of building your research group reputation, credibility and position in the academic world. And yes, it is OK to pay for your paper to be available in the Open Access (so don't forget to include that in the budget of your next grant application).

For many areas that AVT could explore, a significant fraction requires the researchers to expand their research toolkits beyond a set of strategies and techniques with which to analyse yet another translation and compare it against the original. If you are planning a research project in audience reception, you won't get far without understanding research design principles (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). There are probably hundreds of books on research design (some of them actually worth reading), and frowning upon terms like dependent and independent variables, or confusing between-subject and within-subject designs may no longer be the way to follow. If you want to do cutting edge – or at least methodologically correct – research, there is one more thing: statistics. Many researchers in humanities in general, and in AVT research in particular, tend to ignore statistical rules, and are happy with reporting their results using mere percentages. The first author has been in fact guilty of this for years, without realising how little chance she would have, did she ever try to publish these findings in a high-impact journal. Which brings us to the next question...

1.4. “Where to publish?”

Have you ever looked up *translation* in the Scimago Journal Ranking (SJR) or the Web of Science? The search results: *Translational Research*, *Science Translational Medicine*, or *American Journal of Translational Research* may – perhaps to your surprise – have nothing in common with translation as a linguistic transfer between languages, but rather are journals that publish findings in research that aims at turning fundamental discoveries into improvements in human life (e.g. by their applications in medicine).

Even if you are just beginning your academic journey, you may already be familiar with some journals which publish articles in your field. Until now, there has been no journal devoted exclusively to AVT, so you had a choice of general translation studies journals, such as *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice*^{viii}, *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, *Across Languages and Cultures*, *Babel*, *The Translator*, *Meta*, *Target*, *MonTI: monografías de traducción e interpretación*, *Intralinea*, *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*. In recent years, many new titles emerged, such as *Translation*

Studies; Linguistica Antverpiensia New Series – Themes in Translation Studies (LANS-TTS); Translation & Interpreting; Translation and Interpreting Studies; Translation Spaces; Translation, Cognition and Behavior; International Journal of Translation and Interpreting Research; Transletters. International Journal of Translation and Interpreting, yet none of them focuses solely on AVT. A comprehensive list of translation studies journals is maintained on the website of the European Society for Translation Studies and can be found at: <http://www.est-translationstudies.org/resources/journals.html>

1.5. “But wait... somebody did this already!”

How would you feel if one day you discovered that the medicine you take had only been tested once, in one country, by one research team, back in the 1980s? Such was indeed the case with one (and perhaps more) of the cornerstones of AVT: the six-second rule (d'Ydewalle, Rensbergen & Pollet, 1987). It is not uncommon in AVT research to assume that since someone did a study once, the outcome is true beyond doubt and does not need confirmation or replication. Replication is not sexy. Yet, just like with medicines and their effects, AVT findings need to be revisited, preferably on more people than a handful of the author's students.

In his controversial and highly debated paper, Ioannidis (2005) argues that most published research findings in most fields are false. Among many factors which have contributed to the situation, he blames “the high rate of nonreplication (lack of confirmation) of research discoveries”, which in turn is “a consequence of the convenient, yet ill-founded strategy of claiming conclusive research findings solely on the basis of a single study assessed by formal statistical significance, typically for a p-value less than 0.05” (Ioannidis, 2005, p. 696).

So what?

Have you ever considered sending a press release accompanying your research article? However strange this may sound, it is now becoming common practice in many leading research groups from top universities as part of their efforts to position themselves in the academic landscape and to communicate their findings to the general public. Science is changing, and it is changing very fast. Universities and research groups compete on the international arena for the best academics and students, individual scientists compete for (more and more limited) funding, journals compete for the best research papers to establish and maintain their reputation and position on the market. More and more scientists realise the importance of establishing a recognisable “academic brand” (of a researcher, a faculty, a university). In many respects we are witnessing science and academia adapting to the conditions of liquid modernity, where creative scientists and ideas move fast and freely around the world, and research topics that were hot and guaranteed rapid publication in a “luxury” journal one year ago may be merely interesting today (Bauman, 2000).

You may disregard all these changes and follow the well-established paths that so many generations of scholars have taken before. Until perhaps one day you realise that nobody cares about your findings, students are not interested, and you are left alone with your books that sold no copies at all. Or, instead, you can choose an exciting and important topic with a potential of high impact (not only in science, but also in the society), find an active, lively research group with passionate people on board (check what and where they have published so far!), and embark with them on a great scientific adventure.

Good luck and best wishes,
Agnieszka & Piotr

PS

Please revise the rejected paper following the feedback you received and send it to another journal.

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Biographical notes

Agnieszka Szarkowska, PhD, is Associate Professor in the Institute of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw. She is the head of AVT Lab, one of the first research groups on audiovisual translation. Agnieszka is a researcher, academic teacher, ex-translator, translator trainer, and media accessibility consultant. Between 2016 and 2018 she was Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow at the Centre for Translation Studies, University College London, working on the project “Exploring Subtitle Reading with Eye Tracking Technology” funded by the European Commission. Her areas of expertise include audiovisual translation, media accessibility and translator training. She has participated in many research projects, including eye tracking studies on subtitling, audio description in education, text-to-speech audio description, multilingualism in subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing, respelling, and modern art for all. Agnieszka is the Vice-President of the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (ESIST), a member of European Society for Translation Studies (EST), Galician Observatory for Media Accessibility (GALMA), Intermedia Research Group, AKCES expert group and an honorary member of the Polish Audiovisual Translators Association (STAW).

Piotr Wasylczyk, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Physics, University of Warsaw, and Research Associate at the Faculty of Engineering Sciences, University College London. His research interests cover (micro)robotics with potential applications in eye surgery, experimental photonics and lasers. He also teaches effective communication in science and business environments in Poland and the UK.

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^I This is not to say that there is no good work on these popular topics, see for instance Pedersen (2011).

^{II} www.mapaccess.org

^{III} <https://benjamins.com/online/tsb/>

^{IV} https://aplicacionesua.cpd.ua.es/tra_int/usu/buscar.asp?idioma=en

^V Please see *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax and Other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language* by Geoffrey K. Pullum.

^{VI} Cited by M. Jubb in “Academic Books and their Futures: A Report to the AHRC and the British Library”, London 2017, available at https://academicbookfuture.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/academic-books-and-their-futures_jubb1.pdf

^{VII} For example, in *Optics Express* average time to publication is 65 days (<https://www.osapublishing.org/oe/home.cfm>) and in *BMJ Open* the median time to first decision in 2017 was 47 days (<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/pages/about/>)

^{VIII} The name was recently changed from *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*.